



VirginiaGreenTravel.org

The 2011 Annual Virginia Green Progress Report

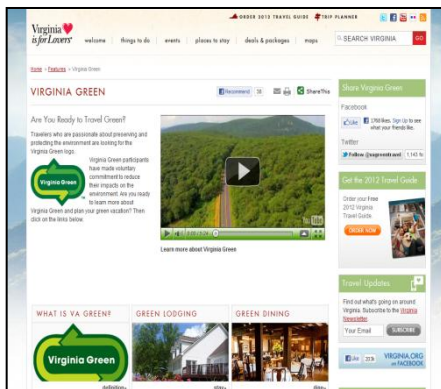


In 2011, Virginia Green continued to grow, improve, and mature as a program. We, as a partnership program, have made incredible progress branding the program to the industry, assisting and improving the efforts of our participants, and marketing the program to the consumer. Due to various factors, we did not increase overall participation by as much as we expected this year. But 2011 was a year in which we positioned the program for long-term success – and 2012 is expected to be quite a year!

Program Highlights

So many presentations, so many site visits, so much progress. Below is a summary of the programs areas where we excelled this past year!

❖ **Consumer Engagement -- VirginiaGreenTravel.org.**



The newly-reformatted website is now fully searchable, ready to assist consumers in their quest to plan “their green vacations”! Full functionality and consumer interfaces are still a work in progress, but this represents the completion of how the program was always meant to function. Green-minded consumers can find VG facilities and are encouraged to provide customer feedback and support to the facilities in the program. In turn, the VG participants are encouraged to become even greener and are creating

meaningful connections with their customers!

❖ **Automation of VG Applications.**

Prior to this year, only Restaurants could apply on-line. Now, Lodging, Attractions, and Events are fully-automated as well. This allows for significant program efficiencies as the Virginia.org database houses and interfaces directly with Virginia Green applications and profiles. This is great progress, but it has also been a time-consuming exercise and continues to be a problem in its use and accessibility for certain users; and it was the main factor that has slowed recruitment/participation growth.

❖ Technical Assistance.

Program “validity” was a major area of focus for this year, and participants were offered technical assistance related to their greening efforts. More than 30 assistance visits were performed during 2011.

❖ Virginia State Parks.



In celebration of their 75th Anniversary, Virginia State Parks and Virginia Green partnered in an effort to make state parks one of the cornerstones of the Virginia Green program and to register all 36 state parks. Technical assistance visits and reports have been made in 6 regional parks, and all of the parks are on track to be full participants before Spring of 2012. In addition, Virginia Green and the non-profit **Keep Virginia Beautiful** are working on a special project to improve recycling and litter prevention at all of the parks; and this project should provide a significant boost to the branding of Virginia Green.

❖ Green Events & Festivals.



Virginia Green worked hard this past year to increase its presence at notable festivals and other events – such as the Virginia State Fair, the Richmond Folk Festival, and many Earth Day celebrations across the state. A new protocol now exists for sending Virginia Green Event” banners to each registered event, thus improving the branding and market awareness of the program.

❖ Virginia State Fair.

This was our first big venture into the world of grassroots consumer engagement. Over 1500 people visited the Virginia Green booth during a 3-day stint, and the booth was manned by program participants!

❖ Merchandising.



Virginia Green flags and banners and new signage and window decals made their debuts this year. These and other items are helping to brand the program and are being offered through the Virginia is for Lovers on-line “store”.

❖ Welcome Centers.



In September, all of the VTC Welcome Centers began a Virginia Green promotion and began actively assisting visitors who want to plan their green vacations. The promotion centers around the new website and features the new program poster, flags, and “ask me” lapel pins worn by staff. Virginia Green also made progress towards developing a partnership with VDOT towards co-branding of their environmental efforts.

❖ **Visitor Centers.**

In December, 18 of the registered Visitor Centers began a similar promotion of the program. This group now operates as the Virginia Green “regional VC contacts staff” and is actively recruiting so it can offer green options to its visitors!



❖ **Social Media.**

After a year of learning and lots of effort, the Virginia Green Facebook is now a busy place with nearly 2000 friends and considerable postings. Plans for 2012 include full attention to Twitter and Linked-In VG sites also.

❖ **Focus on Richmond Region.**

Virginia Green worked throughout the year to increase awareness about the program in the Richmond area, a region that included a surprisingly low number of participants. VG worked in support of various greening efforts and to assist businesses address regional recycling issues. More than 35 new participants joined Virginia Green in 2011, bringing the total to more than 100 in the region; and many others are expected as a result of this concentrated recruitment effort.

❖ **Virginia Green Suppliers Network.**

In 2011, the VGSN took shape as a primary source for Virginia Green participants looking for green products and services. A quarterly newsletter, **Green Source**, began in the Spring highlighting “green connections” between VGSN suppliers and VG participants. VGSN members pay a listing fee and 50% of the fee goes towards Virginia Green’s fund to support marketing and promotional expenses.

❖ **Virginia Green Awards.**

4 Virginia Green participants received the very first “Green Travel Star” awards at the VA-1 conference.

❖ **Sector Expansions.**

Applications and guidance for wineries, campgrounds, golf courses, and shopping centers were fully developed in 2011; and preliminary guidance for transportation centers, film production, and breweries was initiated.



2011 Program Shortcomings

While the program achievements in 2011 were many, Virginia Green did not achieve all of its stated goals for the year.

❖ **Recruitment/Growth.**

Membership increased in 2011 from roughly 900 to 1112 participants. And while active recruitment of new membership was not a stated emphasis for this year, we fully expected that the sector expansions, our work with State Parks and marinas, and overall momentum would result in additional growth.

❖ **Announcement of New Sectors.**

While the applications and guidance were developed for several sectors and were “tried out” through stakeholders, we have not had the time to fully launch / announce these sector programs.

❖ **Sustaining the Program.**

The VGSN and merchandising efforts are now poised to provide future revenue, and many other good ideas are being pursued; the program made relatively little progress towards “sustaining” the program long-term.

❖ **Assistance & Individual Attention.**

While technical assistance efforts were rewarding, they were also very time-consuming; and overall most participants received no direct interaction and assistance.

❖ **Consumer Video.**

Due to other VTC priorities, the project to produce a short consumer-focused video has been continuously delayed.

❖ **Reporting / Measureable Results.**

From the standpoint of program validity, it becomes increasingly important that Virginia Green is able to demonstrate that its participants are actually reducing the environmental impacts of their operations. Virginia Green planned to implement a “re-commitment” requirement this year in which participants would be encouraged to report their progress. However, this process was envisioned as an automated process, and it was delayed while waiting for the automation project to be completed.

Virginia Green Participants by Sector

Lodging	475
Restaurants	157
Attractions	117
Conference Centers	50
Convention Centers	4
Wineries	16
Supporting Organizations	29
Visitor/Welcome Centers	34
Green Events	138
Green Suppliers	93
Total	1112

Summary of Goals for 2012

In 2012, we plan to build upon the many accomplishments of this past year, address the past year’s shortcomings, and embrace new opportunities for strengthening and expanding the program. Here is an abbreviated summary of our goals for the coming year:

❖ **Participation.** Increase membership to 1400 participants.

❖ **Public Recognition Opportunities.** Work actively with VTC to help “tell our story” to the industry by partnering in areas of emphasis for the coming year.

❖ **VirginiaGreenTravel.org.** Fully automate the application process and complete the functionality of the consumer website complete with video.

❖ **Assistance & Involvement.** Continue to provide technical assistance as time allows, but at least “check-in” with every single participant in 2012.

❖ **Sector Programs.** Officially announce and promote Virginia Green applications and



guidance for Wineries, Golf Courses, Campgrounds, and Shopping Centers. Develop guidance for Breweries, Transportation Centers, and Film Production.

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VirginiaGreenTravel.org

Virginia's Campaign to Promote Green Practices in Tourism.

Started in 2007, Virginia Green is run through a partnership between the Virginia Tourism Corporation, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, and the Virginia Hospitality & Travel Association.

